

## **Black Workers and the US Labor Movement!**

The rebellions that are taking place across the country, most notably in Ferguson and Baltimore, must be understood by the labor movement, and especially the labor left, as acts of resistance by the most impacted and dispossessed sections of the US working-class responding to the capitalist economic crisis.

The historical subjugation and national oppression of Black people and especially the exploitation of Black workers in US society reinforced by white supremacy as the social basis for the divisions within the US working-class, has enabled the US ruling-class (the 1-percent), through its control of mainstream media and legislative policies enacted by both major political parties, to criminalize the Black working-class and our communities.

The establishing of a more repressive state, the militarizing of the police as an occupation force also puts in place a military force ready to be deployed against the resistance by the labor movement and the larger US working-class.

This increasing repression taking place under the Obama administration was not by accident. Sections of the US ruling-class had three main objectives for supporting Obama – to discourage resistance by the Black masses, especially against the conservative and imperialist policies of the federal government proposed by Obama; to create a false sense of Black power and post racialism; and to divert consciousness about the power of the Black working-class at the points of production and service and the potential influence on wider sections of the US and international working-class.

Today's Black led resistance to the capitalist neoliberal policies, raises the question for labor of: **Which Side Are You On?** As the labor movement is the largest and most organized framework with the greatest resources of the US working-class, this becomes a decisive question for any long term strategy to organize and mobilize contending and transformative power.

The question of social movement unionism as a rank-and-file democratic alternative to the business unionism that aligns with so-called capitalist liberalism has to be taken more seriously if labor is to be viewed as a genuine social force for democracy, global human rights and social transformation.

An important test and application of social movement unionism in this historical moment of Black led resistance, is for the trade union rank-and-file to support and promote the leadership of Black and Brown workers and to mobilize the all workers to make demands on the corporations and public sector employers and initiate actions to address the needs of the most impacted as well as general needs of the working-class.

Black/Brown rank-and-file caucuses must be developed and supported to play a more visible role in the labor movement to help sharpen the working-class character of the resistance. The Raise Up \$15 and a Union, a social movement embodying a majority of Black, Brown and women workers is a visible part of the resistance. However, with the exception of the stalwart practice of ILWU Local 10, labor has not become a visible and national force.

The slogans Black Lives Matter and Stop the War on Black America needs to be embraced by the labor movement. This will better enable the Black working-class and hopefully all workers in the US and internationally to see labor as having a broader and more radical agenda than trying to reform capitalism. The call for Black self-determination and liberation is a call for the organizing of Black power to ensure the challenges to the deepest structural economic, social and political policies necessary to bring about a real transformation of society that benefits the entire working-class without privileges.

However, we know as the Labor Fight-Back Network, that this has to be brought to the labor movement by our forces, as was done leading to the AFL-CIO resolution on Organizing the South. This is why we must be

clear on the question of the importance of Black worker leadership in the labor movement through organized forms rooted in rank-and-file social movement unionism and accountability.

The debates in the unfolding US presidential elections should be driven by the voices and actions of the working-class in resistance, uniting with the Black led resistance promoting clear structural demands. While the Bernie Sanders campaign will raise important issues, it is important that labor calls on Sanders to come to the independent venues, picket lines and demonstrations of the working-class rank-and-file. Sanders needs to know that labor sees the issues impacting the deepest sections of the working-class, including policies like militarizing the police, mass incarceration the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as priorities for a program challenging the corporate driven direction of US society and global capitalism. The question of support for Sanders would be based on how he helps to give voice to the struggles and demands of the working-class, with an emphasis on Black, Brown and women workers as the most exploited and oppressed sectors.

If the Labor Fight-Back Network promoted a campaign for the trade unions to form Black Caucuses to lead the rank-and-file struggle and demands linking labors fight to the struggles of its most impacted sections, this would be an important advance for the labor movement, with the potential of stemming its decline and organizing the unorganized.

The Black Left Unity Network will be putting out a Draft Manifesto for Black Liberation. We are calling on the trade union rank-and-file to discuss; debate and contribute to its refinement and to endorse and send a delegation of Black workers to the National Assembly for Black Liberation to be held in the spring of 2016.

**Saladin Muhammad**

**For the Labor Fight-Back Conference May 15, 2015**